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TAGS: [KSCA](#) [SENV](#) [ENRG](#) [TRGY](#) [TSPA](#) [EAGR](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY MANILA'S ENVIRONMENTAL OUTREACH

¶1. SUMMARY: Mission Manila engaged in vigorous outreach efforts on an array of environmental issues during April 2009. Ambassador led the way with two provincial trips in April with an environmental focus and events in Manila on Earth Day, April 22. In addition, Embassy invited American scientists to talk about local biodiversity; the Coral Triangle Initiative; and the relation between pollution and global climate change. Our public relations successes included several prominent media reports and the Asian premier on Earth Day of "Into the Abyss", an Embassy-assisted National Geographic documentary on Philippine waters. Our environment and science public outreach has strengthened bilateral relationships; given Filipinos pride in their country's endowments; inspired better environmental stewardship; created forums for talented scientists and U.S. government-funded projects; and given us greater access to government officials and civil society leaders.
END SUMMARY.

U.S. Environmental Commitment

¶2. During April, Ambassador energized some of the Philippines' most senior attorneys and judges in Baguio at the Philippine Supreme Court's Forum on Environmental Justice (Ref. A). She also met with civic and governmental leaders in Puerto Princesa who play key roles in environmental advocacy (Ref. B). On Earth Day itself, Ambassador participated with USAID Mission members in hand-washing demonstrations at the Coca-Cola bottling plant and with the "EcoDefenders" at a Mall of Asia event (Septel).

Land Biodiversity a Surprise to Many

¶3. Other Mission events also highlighted the environment. Field Museum Mammal Curator Dr. Laurence Heaney surprised many people in his audiences with his well-documented assertion that the Philippines has the world's greatest terrestrial diversity per hectare. Dr. Heaney has been coming to the Philippines annually for over 20 years to collect samples for the Philippine National Museum and document the country's rich terrestrial biodiversity. He noted that the Philippines has 1,139 species and 50% are unique to the Philippines, compared to Brazil's 3,131 species, 25% of which are endemic. To put that in perspective, Heaney explained, Brazil has 27 times the land mass as the Philippines. Heaney's talk made front page news in the Sunday, April 5 edition of the Philippine Inquirer, one of the largest circulation daily newspapers.

Marine Diversity Better Known

¶4. The Philippines is at the apex of the coral triangle, which is the center of global marine biodiversity. Dr. Kent Carpenter of Old Dominion University was a Peace Corp volunteer in the Philippines in the 1970s and has been investigating the biology of Philippine waters since then. Dr. Carpenter addressed Manila university

students, scientists, and government officials about the rich species diversity which includes 600 reef-building coral species and 3,000 fish species. He talked about the threats killing the coral and said sedimentation caused by illegal logging and slash-and-burn agriculture is the major cause of coral mortality. Dr. Carpenter promoted the Coral Triangle Initiative, and international effort to save marine biodiversity, financed by over \$40 million USG funds (Ref. C). The Manila Bulletin and the Philippine Inquirer both covered Dr. Carpenter's talk and interviewed him.

Climate Change

¶5. As inhabitants of an island nation vulnerable to sea level rise, Filipinos are concerned about global warming. This concern drew members of academia and civil society to listen to the U.S. Office of Naval Research's Dr. Jeff Reid talk at Ateneo University about air pollution, as measured by six NASA satellites that circle the earth twice a day. Because of the cloud cover in Asia, this area of the world is hard to monitor via satellite, according to Dr. Reid. To address this challenge, NASA installed a monitor at Manila Observatory to measure aerosols (Ref. D), giving scientists data for meteorology, hydrology, and pollution studies. More information on this project is found at:
<http://www.nrlmry.navy.mil/aerosol/#satellite analyses>

Asian Premier of National Geographic Special

¶6. Embassy assisted a USG-funded National Geographic deep sea exploration that documented new species in Philippine waters in October of 2007 (Ref. E). National Geographic gave permission to

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the EconOff to premier the documentary in Asia at Embassy Manila. Filipino scientists who participated, students, Embassy personnel, and Philippine government officials were delighted by the ocean secrets revealed during the screening at the Embassy on Earth Day, April 22. The documentary's trailer may be viewed at:
<http://channel.nationalgeographic.com> "Into the Abyss"
Woods Hole, the world's largest private oceanographic institution, published an on-line article about this ocean exploration with photos:
<http://www.whoi.edu/oceanus/> "Creatures of the Celebes Sea"

KENNEY